

BRAINWASHING

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*DECEMBER 1960.*

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Brainwashing is a colloquial term which has been used in reference to the systematic efforts of the Chinese Communists (and by implication the Soviets) to persuade non-believers to accept Communist allegiance, commands, and/or doctrine by coercive means. More generally, the term has been applied to any technique designed to manipulate human thought or action against the desire, will, or knowledge of the individual. The word brainwashing derives from the Chinese phrase Hsi Nao (Hunter, 1951) and is most appropriately used in reference to Chinese Communist "thought reform" or "ideological remolding" (Szu Hsing Kao Tsao), a program of political indoctrination based on the conception that people who have not been educated in a Communist society have, by definition, incorrect bourgeois attitudes and beliefs, and must therefore be re-educated before they can take their place in a Communist society (Lifton, 1956).

Interest in brainwashing on the part of Western observers and scientists derives from the seemingly successful attempts by the Soviet and Chinese Communist secret police and army to convert Western military and civilian prisoners. Of equal interest, however, has been the seeming success of the Soviet secret police in getting confessions from former high officials of the Communist party as in the purge trials of the 1930's (Leites & Bernaut, 1954); and of the Chinese Communists in indoctrinating their entire population in the remarkably short time of 3 to 5 years.

Because of the close connections between Chinese and Soviet Communism and because of the importance which Soviet psychology seems to attach to the works

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\* Much of the material in this review is from a forthcoming publication, Coercive Persuasion (Schein, 1961). I wish to thank Inge Schneider and Curtis Barker who were my collaborators in preparing that volume and who therefore contributed importantly to this paper. This material was prepared for the 1961 World Affairs Yearbook and will appear there in slightly condensed form.

of Pavlov,\* the assumption has frequently been made that brainwashing is a highly refined adaptation of Pavlovian psychology. From this assumption and the image of scientific mental destruction which it stimulates has come the conception that brainwashing is a highly dangerous and possibly irresistible weapon against the mind of man.

Studies of Chinese Communist and Soviet methods of confession extraction and indoctrination have shown that they do have some common roots in the secret police methods of the pre-Communist autocracies in both countries and that both are heavily influenced by basic principles of Party organization, but also that they diverge in important respects from each other, and that the common connections to Pavlovian psychology are very doubtful (Hinkle & Wolff, 1956; Lifton, 1956; Bauer, 1957; Schein, 1959). Where the Soviets have put emphasis on confession extraction to justify public trials prior to eliminating the victim, the Chinese have from the beginning emphasized the role of confession extraction as only one step in the rehabilitation and reform of the prisoner; where the Soviets have traditionally isolated the prisoner and undermined his resistance by depriving him of any social contact, the crux of the Chinese approach has been to immerse the prisoner in a small group of other prisoners who are as or more advanced in their reform than he; where Soviet methods have suggested scientific and Machiavellian approaches to interrogation and confession extraction, the Chinese methods have suggested the image of a zealous enthusiastic mass movement sweeping converts into its ranks by virtue of its intrinsic

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\* There is some evidence that Pavlov was especially revered during Stalin's later years because of Stalin's personal desires to advance Pavlovian psychology, but that following Stalin's death there has been a steady decline of interest in Pavlov among Soviet psychologists. However, they often find it expedient to translate work which has only remote connections to Pavlovian psychology into Pavlovian terminology or to preface their work with praise of Pavlov, thus giving the impression of a steady monolithic growth of Pavlovianism (Tucker, 1956; Mintz, 1958).

message and reliance on practical knowledge of interpersonal manipulation.

Because the Chinese methods, best described by the label "coercive persuasion," are relatively less known and because the term "brainwashing" applies most appropriately to them, the remainder of this paper will concern itself with reviewing some of the salient findings about Chinese handling of captive groups -- the history of their methods, the actual methods employed, the kinds of target groups involved, the degree of success of the effort, and some attempt to explain theoretically why some Westerners were influenced.

#### The Persuasion Theme in the Development of the Chinese Communist Party

It is the attempt to reform its enemies and prisoners -- to cure the disease and save the man -- which distinguishes the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from other Communist parties. This emphasis on persuasion, rehabilitation, and reform can be related to a number of features in CCP history.

Mao's Peasant Base of Support. Because of the absence of a powerful urban proletariat, Mao, as early as 1925, began to organize a revolution based on peasant support. Although a revolution based on peasant origins had been considered by Lenin, it was a major premise of Marxist ideology that proper class consciousness could only be found in the urban proletariat; peasant origins should lead to the antithesis of the desired Communist attitude because of assumed conservatism deriving from the close ties of the peasant to the land. In organizing peasants, therefore, Mao was led to a "total inversion of certain Marxist pre-suppositions. Instead of deducing ideological tendencies from class affiliations, they (the CCP leadership) decided to deduce class affiliations from ideological tendencies." (Brandt, Schwartz, and Fairbank, 1952). If, through the use of specific ideological appeals such as the fanning of the grievances of the peasant toward his landlords, one could persuade the peasant to the acceptance

of Communist premises, the peasant would by definition become a Communist regardless of actual social origins.

Mao's success in organizing peasants proved the correctness of the assumption that Communist premises could be learned, an assumption which was of course strongly supported by the experiences of the leaders themselves, most of whom did not qualify by social origin as members of the proletariat (Mao's own origin was on a farm in the province of Hunan). The assumption that even persons with incorrect social origins could learn the Communist ideology, and, on the other hand, that even persons with correct social origins could unlearn what presumably their class status had bestowed upon them, is, of course, at the heart of the Chinese Communist preoccupation with re-education and reform.

Replenishing Manpower During the Civil War. The recruitment of converts from initially hostile groups was necessary for the CCP's survival and to this end the CCP developed increasingly effective means of coercive persuasion. From Kuomintang (KMT) defectors, prisoners of war, and uneducated rural or urban youth the CCP was able to build up an effectively indoctrinated Red Army and party organization.

By treating prisoners leniently and emphasizing to them that leniency would continue so long as they were willing to re-educate themselves, the CCP was able to obtain many genuine converts to Communism. The CCP would emphasize that the prisoner was only misguided and that his bourgeois background would not be held against him if he was prepared to confess, accept the "truth" about his criminal past, and learn the truth about the ultimate path to peace and prosperity through Communism.

The Exigencies of Guerrilla Warfare. The blockade strategy of the KMT in the early 1930's and of the Japanese in the 1940's forced the Red Army to become primarily a guerrilla operation using hit-and-run tactics. The very nature of

these operations required extensive decentralization of administration authority, a wide scattering of forces, and total dependence for basic supplies of food on the local peasantry. "If the masses in any area disliked Communist policy enough to stop giving active support to the local Communist army, that army would be defeated." (Lindsay, 1950, p. 25). To insure active support, the Communists had to rely on persuasion and on constant adaptation of Marxist-Leninist ideology to the local situation. Because of extensive decentralization, even the rank-and-file had to have an adequate working knowledge of Communism and had to learn how to persuade others to it. The growing number of "experts" in the arts of persuasion, of course, proved to be crucial after the take-over when mass indoctrination of the Chinese population became possible.

Education in "Liberated" Areas and Coalition Government. The CCP found itself in control of areas of China early in its history, providing the opportunity for the initiation of programs of literacy training and "cultural" education. Such programs made possible effective political tutelage through devices such as teaching initially those characters which would make possible the reading of Communist slogans, fanning areas of discontent with the old system, introducing into education the rudiments of Communist ideology, and so on. Such efforts were partly designed to insure Communist victories at the polls if control by force had to be relinquished.

In order to aid the defeat of the Japanese and to build the strength of the CCP, Mao chose to enter into a coalition government with the KMT and to adopt a "united front" strategy. Having committed himself to sharing control with other parties, he could not rely on coercion to insure that his party would remain in control. The strength of local militias in many parts of China made the winning of such control by force an expensive operation in any case. Mao chose to try to persuade such village militias to work with him and to rely on political tutelage to insure his continued control.

The Cheng Feng (Party Reform) Movement. The decentralization of responsibility for carrying the ideology to the masses of China during the growth of the movement was not without inevitable problems. The severest of these was apparently the deviations which crept into the thinking of the local cadres, cut off as they were from central party authority in much of their activity. The establishment of a secure headquarters in Yen-an during the late 1930's provided the opportunity in the 1940's to launch the Party Reform movement for the "correction of unorthodox tendencies." The approach which was to be used differed sharply from that used in the purge as it had developed in the Soviet Union, in the emphasis on moral suasion and re-indoctrination rather than on the identification and liquidation of deviants.

All members of the CCP and all cadres were expected to participate in self-examination and mutual help to identify and rectify deviationist tendencies in thought and action, and this rectification was to be accomplished by non-violent means. The methods used in this program were built on those developed in the early history of the movement and foreshadowed the treatment which was to be accorded to United Nations prisoners of war a decade later:

1) the encouragement of grievances against any and all non-Communist groups or ideas combined with a strong emphasis on highly acceptable positive ideals (e.g., get rid of corrupt landlords to help reconstruct China, fight foreign aggression from the Japanese to win China for its own people, etc.);

2) heavy reliance on group discussion in an atmosphere demanding of each member a complete exposure of his thought and feeling to the scrutiny and analysis of others;

3) the use of mutual and self-criticism to stimulate self-examination and to facilitate competition among group members in exposure of self and others with the aim of denigrating and destroying all emotional ties with the past;

4) systematic reward by group leaders and group members of self-exposure, confession and self-criticism, thus affirming the policy that any man was redeemable provided he was willing to allow his "reactionary tendencies" to be exorcised;

5) the teaching of Communist doctrine in a group setting in which the group became a vehicle for the thinking through of ideological material to initially stated conclusions, and in which it was each member's responsibility to find the meaning of the theoretical material for his own concrete case -- thus bringing theory and action into line with each other;

6) an unmistakable threat of expulsion from the Party for anyone not willing to engage in reform, to re-educate himself.

What is distinctive in this approach is the sophistication of the CCP in the use of social and interpersonal forces in the service of creating a situation in which persuasion was likely to be successful. Given that the individual could be coerced into exposing himself to the kinds of group forces described briefly above, it was highly likely that he would come to accept firmly the premises and attitudes which the leaders espoused.

In summary, coercive persuasion and the use of group forces was born of the necessity to win over neutral and hostile elements when the CCP was as yet too weak to impose control by force, but it became an effective working tool of the growing movement and came, with the take-over, to be one of the CCP's most salient characteristics as an approach to social control.



## Thought Reform After the Take-Over on the Mainland

The CCP approach to organizing and controlling the large Chinese population has been to rely on a complex mixture of coercion and persuasion. The CCP leadership has certainly been willing to use as much terror as was necessary to establish control and to launch certain key programs like Land Reform. They have also revived the qin chia system of mutual surveillance by making each citizen responsible for several others and demanding that any degree of deviation in thought or action from the party line be immediately reported to the authorities. At the same time, "a tremendous amount of energy is devoted to propagandizing, educating, indoctrinating, and in effect trying to convert the Chinese people. The fiction is consistently maintained that virtually everything that people are forced to do is done 'voluntarily' and the spectacle of people 'enthusiastically' doing things which are obviously in conflict with their own personal interests is one of the most remarkable phenomena observable in China." (Barnett, 1956, p. 125).

To support their attempts to indoctrinate the population, the CCP has made all mass media of communication an extension of the party propaganda apparatus. Information coming from the West is carefully censored and the party line is promulgated through careful coordination of all possible media -- newspapers, movies, radio, loudspeakers in public places, dramatic productions, cartoons, comics, magazines, books, pamphlets, paintings, posters, dances, songs, and village story tellers. Supplementing these audio-visual techniques is an elaborate oral agitation network designed to reach the high number of illiterates. "The organized propaganda apparatus is so extensive that the Chinese Communists claim that during special campaigns they can mobilize fifteen per cent of the total population actively to propagandize the remaining eighty-five per cent." (Barnett, 1956, p. 126).

Such widespread campaigns as "Land Reform" (1950), "Resist America, Aid Korea," (1950), "Three-Anti (anti-corruption, anti-waste, and anti-bureaucratism in government and party)," (1952), and "Ideological Remolding" (1952, 1957, and 1958) have served to mobilize the Chinese population behind the government and have further facilitated indoctrination. For our purposes it is the ideological remolding or thought reform drives which are of greatest interest because the techniques involved in them have come most consistently to be associated with the idea of brainwashing.

Thought reform was implemented throughout China through the use of groups devoted to criticism, self-criticism, accusation, "grievance telling," discussion, and study, usually led by party cadre who reported to higher authorities on the progress of members of the group.

Study groups averaging in size from 10 to 12 were organized in every village, school, factory, jail, farm, etc. to rationalize material presented through reading or lecture and to make it possible for each member to think through how the theoretical point might apply to his own case. "Discussion within the group is often prolonged and intense. Members can, and in fact are expected to raise doubts about the official 'correct' view on any subject; but when this happens all other members are expected to argue in favor of the official line. The final objective is mutual agreement and unanimous support of the official line." (Barnett, 1966, p. 127).

Accusation meetings were usually held in neighborhoods, villages, farms, or cooperatives for the purpose of mobilizing grievances against the KMT, landlords, feudalism, and most of all, American imperialism. By having individuals tell their life history and by suitably timing their own accusations, skilled activists could build up emotions in the group to fever pitch which sometimes

resulted directly in the trial and perhaps execution of a "cruel landlord" or "corrupt official."

Criticism and self-criticism was often conducted as part of the study group. Everyone in the group was expected to write out a detailed autobiography (the illiterates could always find scribes to whom to dictate their life story) as a basis for pinpointing sources of reactionary tendencies in his past and as preparation for revealing his "innermost" thoughts to the group. When the life histories were discussed critically in the group, the cadre or activist skillfully blended together political ideology with moralistic principles. Thus, to be a good Communist in the end was tantamount to being unselfish, modest, considerate, willing to take responsibility and so on, each defined, of course, in terms of the person's relationship to the government. To be unselfish meant to be willing to pay ever higher taxes to the government.

In meetings like these it was usually impossible to hide true feelings under the scrutiny of other group members who were competing with each other in the amount of "help" they could give in uncovering basic feelings and attitudes. The growing intimacy of members made it easier for them to see through rationalizations and other defenses, which forced each member into a genuine reappraisal of his own past and heightened the likelihood that he would discover positive features in an ideology which he knew he must accept anyway.

A more intensive form of thought reform was in evidence in the Revolutionary Universities which served as training grounds for cadres (Gourlay, 1952; Lifton, 1957). Promising young people would be recruited by methods ranging from elaborate promises of bright futures to virtual forced conscription and put through intensive indoctrination programs of several months' duration. Again a heavy emphasis was given to self-examination and confession in the context of small group discussion, with the aim of producing a genuine severance of all emotional

ties to the past and a rebuilding of the student's self-image in terms of the new Communist society. As in other kinds of rites de passage, the student ratified his growing new identity by acts such as public denunciation of his father.

For those "students" who proved themselves to be recalcitrant or who needed a more "fundamental" kind of re-education, as well as for professionals, intellectuals, and party members whose occupations might make their class-consciousness too parochial, there was "reform through labor." Though reform through labor was rationalized as the best way quickly to acquire the proletariat point of view, it seems generally to have been perceived as punishment and to have been viewed as little more than slave labor to be avoided at all costs.

For those individuals (whether Chinese or foreigner) who were accused of or suspected of counter-revolutionary activity there were many kinds of prisons. However, it is noteworthy that the thought reform movement also permeated the prison, resulting in the assumption that the inmates should and could be reformed. The whole reform scheme emphasized that the prisoner should be treated leniently no matter how serious his alleged crime, and should be urged to confess and change his point of view. Leniency, of course, was accorded only to the prisoner who sincerely cooperated with the authorities in his own rehabilitation and reform.

### Conclusion

What were the purposes of this extensive effort to indoctrinate and what success was achieved by the regime? The avowed purpose of thought reform was to create a "new man" whose basic character and attitudes would be ideally fitted for the Communist society of the future. For the different target groups who become involved in thought reform this usually meant the adoption of certain specific attitudes as well as an underlying set of Communist premises -- the peasant had to adopt "correct" attitudes about having his land collectivized, the businessman about having the government expropriate him, the bourgeois

reactionary about having to give up his emotional ties to parents, friends, and sometimes spouses if the latter were considered to be political liabilities. The political prisoner was expected to undergo a more fundamental re-evaluation of his past life and to recognize how various of his activities had been harmful to "the people." The major implicit purposes of thought reform appeared to be the creation of obedient citizens and cadres, and the conversion of an entrenched bureaucracy and intelligentsia into an arm of the Communist state. In a sense thought reform was an elaborate initiation rite which everyone who wished to acquire any status in the new Communist society had to undergo.

The success of the regime in fulfilling its purposes is difficult to evaluate. The visible effect of thought reform in combination with the coercive apparatus upon which it rests had been the creation of massive conformity in all sectors of Chinese society. Almost every visitor to Communist China has been struck by the degree to which all citizens look alike, speak alike, and act alike (e.g., Guillain, 1957). It has also been observed that the disciplined efforts of masses of the population have led to a number of tangible accomplishments -- increased productivity in some areas of the economy, military success in Korea, and the eradication of certain vices ("there are no more beggars on the streets of Peking").

There is little doubt that the ascetic, moralistic, and idealistic tone of the message of thought reform has had a strong impact on a serious younger generation bent upon bringing the "New China" into the front ranks of world powers. On the other hand, there are a number of indications that thought reform has not gone deep in influencing attitudes -- the burst of criticism which followed Mao's Let 100 Flowers Bloom speech, the reports of defectors that group discussion, study, criticism, and self-criticism are engaged in only superficially, and the high number of unreconstructed critics in the

political prisons (as estimated by Western repatriates). The safest conclusion is that the effects of thought reform have been uneven -- the effects have been different on different parts of Chinese society and have been a function of the skill and sophistication of the cadres responsible for it. For example, almost all of the cases of successful reform of Western prisoners come from the Peking prison and at least part of the reason seems to be the more highly motivated and skilled prison personnel.

#### The Involvement of Western Prisoners

Westerners became involved with Chinese Communist thought reform in two ways: several hundred European and American professionals, businessmen, and missionaries were arrested on the mainland and subjected to reform in prison, and several thousand United Nations prisoners of war (POWs) encountered a somewhat milder version in the POW camps of North Korea. The arrests on the mainland probably occurred for a number of reasons -- to break spy rings which the Communists believed to be operating, to facilitate propaganda operations by discrediting Western efforts in China, to expropriate the properties of Westerners, to collect hostages for political negotiations, and to assert Asian superiority over a group to which the Chinese had felt inferior for so long. It is quite unlikely that any of the arrests occurred in order to subject the prisoner to thought reform; rather the reform was a regular part of prison procedure and had to involve all prisoners.

The same thought reform emphasis also operated within the Red Army and led to the routine attempts to indoctrinate POWs in Korea. In these cases also one gets the feeling that thought reform was incidental rather than basic, with the basic purpose being the exploitation of the POW for a variety of propaganda objectives. Thus the germ warfare confessions and the variety of collaborative behaviors engaged in by the POWs were not basically related to brainwashing, if

by that term one understands the whole methodology associated with thought reform. The lectures, group discussion, autobiography writing, and criticism sessions built around the general "lenient approach" certainly aided the Chinese in eliciting collaborative behavior on the part of the POW, but most of such behavior was related more immediately to the need for physical and psychological survival than to the acceptance of any portion of Communist ideology.

#### Treatment of Western Civilians in Prisons

The treatment of civilians in prison varied widely depending upon the location of the prison, the political climate, and the nature of the alleged crime (Schein, 1961). The most refined thought reform was in evidence in the Peking prison from whence came most of the cases of alleged successful brainwashing. The changes in the beliefs, attitudes, and values which the prison regimen produced (which in some cases were substantial and lasting) can only be accounted for by a consideration of all the pressures which the total experience generated, even though some of these pressures were incidental to the thought reform program as such.

The initial attitude of the prisoner was important. If he had seen only the good side of Communism, as exhibited in the admirable take-over operation in cities like Peking, he was more likely to accept the "lenient policy" and thus become favorably disposed toward Chinese Communist penal methods. If he had seen the brutal side of Communism as in the Land Reform movement, he was usually predisposed to believe nothing the Communists said and to resist any impulse to be favorably disposed toward them.

Arrest usually followed a period of surveillance and resulted in the prisoner's either being detained in his own house or being taken to some form of prison. He was usually not told the charges against him, yet it was made clear

to him that he was considered to be guilty from the moment of arrest on. Once arrested, he was expected to come to understand the following version of his predicament: he was in prison because the government considered him a criminal; his crime was obvious to everyone but to him; his first task was to understand the nature of his crime and in this task the authorities and fellow prisoners would do all they could to help him; through analysis of his past behavior he would be shown and would discover how the ultimate consequences of his actions had been harmful to the Chinese people. Once he saw his guilt, he was expected to confess, repent, and reform the undesirable thoughts, attitudes, feelings and actions which had led to his crimes in the first place.

From the Communist point of view guilt was judged "objectively," which meant that anything which ultimately could have harmed the Chinese people was a crime even if unintended or not acted upon. Thus a prisoner might be considered guilty because of his associations, his alleged intentions, his incorrect thoughts or attitudes, and, most importantly, his incorrect social origins. If he was other than proletarian by birth he was considered to have acquired incorrect points of view and attitudes throughout his life which eventually would result in harmful action toward the common people.

From the prisoner's point of view his arrest was unjustified, the accusations of guilt in the initial confrontation with judge or interrogator ridiculous, and the statements about leniency to those who confess meaningless. Only as the full force of the prison regimen made itself felt on him did he come to be able to appreciate intellectually and emotionally what was wanted of him.

The manner in which the prisoner came to be influenced to accept the Communist's definition of his guilt can best be described by distinguishing two broad phases -- 1) a process of "unfreezing," in which the prisoner's physical resistance, social and emotional supports, self-image and sense of integrity, and



basic values and personality were undermined, thereby creating a state of "readiness" to be influenced; and 2) a process of "changing," in which the prisoner discovered how the adoption of "the people's standpoint" and a re-evaluation of himself from this perspective would provide him with a solution to the problems created by the prison pressures. The degree of permanence of the changes in attitude which had occurred would depend on the degree to which these were subsequently integrated with other values and attitudes the prisoner held and were supported by others back home.

### Unfreezing

The prisoner's physical strength was undermined by the general inadequacy of the diet, loss of sleep due to intermittent and continuous interrogation, illnesses, lack of exercise, excessive cold or heat in combination with inappropriate clothing, prolonged standing or squatting during interrogation or as a punishment for infraction of the prison regulations, excessive pain from the wearing of manacles behind the back and ankle chains (which were put on as punishment if the authorities felt that the prisoner was not genuinely trying to reform himself), cuffing and beating by cell mates, and innumerable other events in the prison regimen.

The prisoner's social and emotional supports were undermined by his being completely cut off from any communication with the outside (no incoming or outgoing mail was permitted, and no non-Communist newspapers, etc. were available), by the prohibition of any close emotional relationship with another prisoner except in the context of reform, by the introduction of testimonials of various sorts in the form of confessions by others whom the prisoner respected or simply by surrounding the prisoner with cell mates who were enthusiastic about reforming themselves and who condemned all the values to which he adhered.

The prisoner's image of himself and his sense of integrity or inviolability were undermined primarily by the humiliation, revilement, and brutalization he suffered at the hands of his cell mates in the process of "struggle." Most prisoners were put into a cell containing several Chinese prisoners who were further along in reforming themselves and who saw it as their primary duty to "help" their most backward member to see the truth about himself in order that the whole cell might advance. Each such cell had a leader who was in close contact with the authorities for purposes of reporting on the cell's progress and getting advice on how to handle the Western member. In this setting the cell mates found ways of putting extreme pressure on their unreformed member, particularly since he was often completely dependent upon them for help in feeding himself, eliminating, etc. (especially if he were manacled). The only thing which would satisfy the cell mates was a sincere confession, but since the prisoner could not guess initially what this meant or what he was to confess, he brought down the full wrath of the others upon his head. They believed in his guilt and felt that only his stubbornness and reactionary tendencies could account for his refusal to confess. The only valid identity granted to him was that of guilty criminal; any attempt to be anything else -- a doctor, a missionary, an innocent victim of circumstance -- was condemned violently. The fact that this pressure was applied twenty-four hours a day for weeks or months on end must have made it especially potent; there was no private time and no opportunity for retreat.

Other facets of the environment undermined the prisoner's self-image. The prisoner was identified only by number; his every action during the day was carefully prescribed -- when to eat, when to go to the toilet, when to wash, etc. The time allotted to these activities was usually far too short to allow for their satisfactory completion (e.g., two minutes for running out to the toilet,

eliminating, and returning at a given time of day); he was prohibited from making any decisions -- every act had to be preceded by permission from the guard or coordinated carefully with the cell mates (e.g., since sleeping quarters were crowded, prisoners slept huddled together and all had to shift position in unison on an agreed upon signal); judges and interrogators made a convincing argument that the prisoner could not hope to be released and ever be anything again unless he confessed and repented; the prisoner was often seduced into behavior violating his own self-image, such as making attempts at false confessions or denouncing loved ones. The whole prison atmosphere was completely demeaning.

Some of these same factors also tended to undermine the prisoner's more fundamental values and personality defenses. His state of complete dependency often aroused childhood conflicts and stimulated unconscious guilt; the cell mates constantly rejected and demeaned the prisoner's values or if these were strong ethical principles as in the case of priests, showed in many little ways how the person had in his past or was in his present behavior failing to live up to the very values he professed (e.g., pointing out that most missions employed Chinese in "demeaning" jobs such as cooks or houseboys, or that the priest's behavior in the cell was often selfishly motivated).

Guilt was also aroused by the recognition on the part of prisoners that their own middle class values did indeed lead them to subtle prejudices against the working classes and that these prejudices had shown up in their attitudes toward the Chinese prior to imprisonment (e.g., preference for living in fancy quarters, social contacts mostly with the embassy set, etc.). At the same time the values which the Communists professed are so universally valid as to have been unassailable -- unselfishness, working for the greater good of humanity, peace, etc. -- yet are so difficult to uphold in an absolute sense that the prisoner was

constantly having his failures pointed out to him (e.g., taking up too much room while sleeping was considered evidence of selfishness reflecting bad bourgeois attitudes).

#### Change in Attitudes and Self-image

The constant threats of death or permanent non-repatriation led to anxiety and despair which was difficult to cope with. But even more difficult for the prisoner was his increasing recognition that his cell mates really took the lenient policy of the government seriously and were making a genuine attempt to reform themselves. As the cell mates came to be seen as real people rather than merely agents of the prison authorities, the prisoner felt increasingly guilty for his hostility toward them and increasingly committed to trying to understand their point of view. Because his own beliefs, values, and attitudes had been undermined, and because he found himself in an insoluble situation, he became increasingly disposed to trying to find a solution through forming relationships with others who seemed to have found a solution. As his identification with one or more cell mates grew, he came increasingly to understand the basic premises underlying "the people's standpoint," and how he might be perceived to be guilty from this standpoint.

Because the prison experiences had elicited a variety of guilt feelings already, it became possible for the prisoner to attach his guilt feelings increasingly to the crimes which he began to see in his own past behavior, and thus to begin a process of "sincere" confession. He could see that his innocent letters about his trip through a farm area could be giving valuable economic information to the American enemy, that his discussions with people in embassies concerning the morale of students could be used in psychological warfare against the Communists, that his hobnobbing with the embassy set was giving aid and comfort to reactionary forces, or that his failure to join the Communists could

be construed as hostility toward them. Once this process of self re-evaluation began, the prisoner received all kinds of help and support from the cell mates and once again was able to enter into meaningful emotional relationships with others. His terrible social-emotional isolation was at an end and his role as repentant sinner was given increasing support.

The key elements in this process were 1) the identifications which formed with cell mates, thus making it possible for the prisoner to begin to understand the point of view from which he was judged guilty, and 2) the re-evaluation of actual behavior engaged in, which occurred when he applied the scale of values embodied in "the people's standpoint" to his own behavior. The prisoner was not expected to manufacture a false confession, but was expected to see that his actual behavior had in fact been criminal from the Communist point of view.

The intensive self-analysis which accompanied this process often led the prisoner to recognize genuine faults in his own character and as this happened his reform took on a personal as well as political meaning. Some of the prisoners had come to China uncertain of their basic identity and value systems and found in the prison experience an opportunity to arrive at some genuine resolutions of long standing conflicts or to become completely committed to some value system.

### The role of the group cell

The role of the group cell in facilitating this process of unfreezing and attitude change was crucial. The enforced close contact with others made it likely that strong feelings of guilt, anxiety, and hostility would be generated which would heighten the probability of some kind of identification with a cell mate occurring, either as a defense against the stimulation of deeper conflicts or as a solution to the identity problem which the group cell created. At the same time, the presence of several others heightened the probability that no

matter what kind of a defensive maneuver the prisoner tried there would be at least one other who would, because of his own personality, "see through" and be able to expose the defense.

The complete unanimity of outlook of several others is, of course, a most potent group force which is virtually impossible to resist psychologically. One or two others may be wrong, but when three or more others seem independently to hold the same view, these views must be taken seriously.\*

The availability of several others increased the probability that there would be at least one other who was in terms of background or personality sufficiently similar to the prisoner to facilitate an identification with him. Once such an identification resulted in some efforts on the part of the prisoner to change his attitudes, the group provided not only many models of what it was the prisoner was expected to learn, but it also provided the opportunity for coaching and tutoring relationships to develop in which rapid "feed-back" could be obtained by the prisoner on whether he was on the right track or not.

#### Study, Interrogation, and Trial

The events described thus far were supplemented by study sessions in which the group cell would start with a lecture or some written material and analyze it, with criticism and self-criticism meetings, and with autobiography writing, but these activities did not have genuine impact on the Western prisoner until he had begun the more fundamental self re-evaluation described above. If the prisoner were on the road to making a suitable confession and adopting new attitudes toward himself and others in line with the Communist ethic, the study and

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\* This conclusion is based on a variety of research of which the most cogent are the studies of Asch (1951).

other sessions were very useful in providing rationalizations, theory, and a broader conception of what Communism meant, as well as acquainting the prisoner increasingly with Communist semantics.

Throughout his imprisonment, the prisoner was periodically confronted with interrogation sessions and with discussions of his case in the presence of one or more judges. The prisoner's relationship to these authorities was not dissimilar to the heretic's relationship to the inquisitor of the middle ages in that the case could only be settled when the prisoner had made a suitable confession, suitable being defined by the personal judgment of the authorities, not by law. Psychologically meaningful relationships also grew up with interrogators but not as frequently as with cell mates. Interrogation more often than not was one of the stresses which tended to unfreeze the prisoner and made him increasingly search for a solution to his dilemma.

Once the prisoner began to adopt "the people's standpoint" and to apply this yardstick to his own behavior, he began to be able to confess in a manner which satisfied the authorities. After varying lengths of time, during which he might write and rewrite his confession a half dozen times or more, he would be brought to trial and usually sentenced to imprisonment for a period roughly approximating the length of time he had already spent in prison, to be followed by expulsion from China. The confession, then, usually served as the criterion of the degree of reform, though the authorities also had available to them the reports of the cell chief on the progress which a given prisoner was making. The release of Western prisoners was, of course, sometimes dictated more by international negotiations than by degree of reform or the adequacy of the confession. Many prisoners were released who apparently never made a damaging confession, and some were released who made confessions but who obviously did not adopt "the people's standpoint" (as evidenced by their immediate repudiation

of the confession following their release by the Communists). Finally, a number of Western prisoners have been given longer sentences which they are still serving.

### Results

The description of coercive persuasion given above applies only to a small number of Western prisoners (the number is difficult to estimate for obvious reasons but is perhaps no larger than 50, taking Americans and Europeans together). The majority of Westerners who were imprisoned either encountered inefficient prisons or were not considered important enough to be reformed. Many of them encountered reform in a superficial fashion -- study sessions and criticism performed as a necessary daily ritual rather than an important psychological activity. Many were never placed into group cells of more reformed prisoners, but were either kept in solitary confinement or placed with other "reactionary" prisoners with whom they were forbidden to communicate in any way whatsoever. Successful brainwashing, in the sense of the repatriate espousing Communist attitudes and reiterating his crimes following release from Communist China, was a rare outcome. Genuine attitude change could only occur if there were already a predisposition in the prisoner and if he encountered a highly effective prison regimen built around the use of the group cell.

Those Americans who exhibited Communist influence at the time of their release into Hong Kong have had varied histories since their release. Several of them have re-evaluated their experiences once again after their return home and have ended up wondering how they could ever have believed what they had professed to believe toward the end of their imprisonment. Several others have vacillated between sympathy for the Communist position and sympathy for the Western position and are continuing to search for some resolution to their value and attitude conflicts; several have had genuine personality changes built around ethical principles



which Communism shares with other value systems, and these individuals have continued to believe that they were guilty of the crimes to which they confessed, that they were indeed treated leniently by the Communists, that the Communist position on matters of basic ethics and values is correct, and that they must continue to live by these principles even if they encounter hostility in the United States. Some have used thought reform as a basis for genuine personal reform and are grateful to the Chinese for providing this opportunity.

#### Treatment of Prisoners of War in Korea

The experiences of United Nations (UN) POWs at the hands of the Chinese Communists reflected the general thought reform emphasis, but because of the large number of POWs and some specific political goals, the actual events of imprisonment worked out differently in several respects (Schein, 1956). The problem which confronted the West with the POWs was not so much their ideological conversion, of which there was virtually none, but rather a variety of collaborative behaviors (such as making radio broadcasts praising the CCP, signing "peace" petitions, asking others to cooperate with the enemy, serving on "peace" committees, making germ warfare confessions, and so on) which the Communists used skillfully to embarrass the United States in particular during the Korean episode.

The American POW was completely unprepared for the political exploitation to which he was subjected, and many of his responses to the Chinese efforts are to be explained primarily by this lack of preparation. Shortly after the UN's entry into Korea the primary expectation on the part of the troops was that capture would result in being tortured, abandoned, or killed by the North Koreans. Subsequent studies of atrocities in Korea substantiated these rumors in that most of the brutal treatment of the POW was the result of North Korean handling, (U.S. Army, 1953).

### Capture by the Chinese

If a man was captured by the Chinese, however, he found instead of harshness and brutality a friendly welcome, an outstretched hand, and a greeting in broken English of "Welcome," "Congratulations, you have been liberated," or "You have now joined the Fighters for Peace." Because many of the men were unclear about their mission in Korea and resented fighting on foreign soil against an unfamiliar enemy, they were initially receptive to any mention of peace. The Chinese then typically gathered groups of prisoners together at collection points and further explained the "lenient policy": POWs were not viewed as enemy troops but as misguided, uneducated, or unawakened people who had been "tricked into fighting for an evil capitalist society," and who could be brought to see the "truth" about the Korean war and the basic validity of Communist peace efforts. If a prisoner was willing to listen to the Communist point of view, to study it, and to show his sincerity by collaborating with the enemy, he was to be favored and to be treated as a brother in a common cause. If he refused to "learn the truth," he deserved nothing more than harsh treatment, condemnation as a reactionary, and permanent imprisonment.

### The Problem of Survival in Temporary Camps

Most of the men were captured during the winter of 1950-1951, and the first months of captivity were a tough struggle for survival. Apparently the Chinese were unwilling or unable to create adequately supplied POW compounds in time to take care of the large number of POWs they captured, resulting in a marginal diet for Western soldiers, a high rate of illness which was inadequately treated, lack of medical care for the wounded, and extensive exposure to the elements. This combination of circumstances resulted in more than 40 percent of the POWs dying within the first six months of captivity.

Psychologically this was a most difficult time for the POW because the marginal conditions stimulated competition for the scarce resources available, morale was low anyway because of the uncertain future which capture by an Oriental enemy signalled, and the Chinese repeatedly protested that the inadequate supplies of food and medicine resulted from UN bombing of supply lines, not from their own deliberate policy or callousness. They were always highly solicitous and sympathetic, which robbed the prisoners of the opportunity to band together around their common hatred of the enemy. The fact that there were among the large number of prisoners some who, from the outset, were willing to take advantage of others or to curry the favor of the Chinese created an additional morale problem which the Chinese, of course, exacerbated by offering more and better food and medicine to those prisoners who showed a willingness to cooperate with them.

The men were marched north and housed in various kinds of temporary compounds during this winter and were moved into more permanent POW compounds along the banks of the Yalu during the spring of 1951. Shelter, food supplies, medical care, and clothing improved sharply with the settling into the permanent compounds, but psychological pressures did not cease because of the manner in which the Chinese organized and operated the camps.

#### Deliberate Disorganization of POWs in Permanent Camps

The most significant feature of Chinese prison camp control was the systematic destruction of the POW formal and informal group structure which in the end resulted in widespread mutual mistrust among the men and the necessity for each man to withdraw increasingly into a shell even though he was in the midst of others.

The authority structure of the POW group was destroyed first by segregating all officers and later all non-commissioned officers, thus leaving the mass of

prisoners without formal authority of any kind. The prisoners were organized into squads, platoons, and companies but only the squads were commanded by prisoners and the squad leaders were usually the lowest ranking enlisted men or prisoners who were willing to cooperate with the Chinese. All these measures were justified to the men in terms of the premise that military rank has no significance under Communism and it was the working man who should be given the authority to command.

Communist sophistication in destroying group cohesion had been shown in the earlier period also when units or large groups of POWs including all ranks were still together. For example, the highest ranking officers would be given the alternative of signing a peace petition and ordering their troops to sign or having their group punished severely. Attempts by the ranking officers to work out compromises which would satisfy the Chinese yet would increase the chances of the survival of their men would often appear to lower ranking officers like collaboration. They would then either overtly or covertly fail to obey orders, thus destroying the chain of command and, in effect, throwing the troops on their own resources.

The informal social structure of the POW group was undermined by a variety of techniques: 1) the Chinese prohibited any form of organized activity not sponsored by themselves, including religious services and recreational activities; 2) emergent leaders were usually discovered and segregated; 3) extensive use of spies and POW informers made possible close surveillance of all informal activities and the Chinese frequently let POWs know that even their most private conversations and plans were known, thus creating mutual mistrust since no one could be sure that his best friends were not informers; 4) the conduct of interrogations weakened social-emotional ties still further by the frequent presentation to a man of confessions or military information written out by a fellow prisoner; what he usually did not know is that the fellow prisoner had not provided the information

voluntarily but had perhaps agreed to copy it out of some manuals which the Chinese showed him they already possessed; written information of this sort was often widely publicized in camp newspapers to create the impression that collaboration was the rule rather than the exception; 5) the confessions of germ warfare which were coerced from a number of Air Force officers and enlisted men were exploited by forcing several of them to go to the POW camps to give lectures on how they had used germ warfare, usually creating a big impression on the listeners.

As in the case of the civilian prisoner, bonds to loved ones and to the home country were severed by the prohibition of any contact with the outside. Only pro-Communist literature was available in the prison camp libraries; mail was delivered to a prisoner only if it contained bad news or was completely innocuous; if a man inquired about his mail he was usually told that none had arrived, which must mean that his loved ones had abandoned him.

Most of the POWs were forced to write autobiographies and to discuss details of their personal histories during lengthy interrogations. It would be pointed out to a man how any misfortune or difficulty he reported must be the product of the political system under which he grew up, a message which found a responsive chord in the drifters and malcontents and in those prisoners whose enlistment in the Army had, in the first place, been motivated by their failure to achieve any other kind of satisfactory occupational career.

Criticism and self-criticism could not be introduced directly into POW groups without it becoming a mere mockery of what was intended, but it was used effectively to embarrass individual POWs and thereby to weaken the morale of the whole group. For example, most men were required to sign lengthy camp rules

shortly after their arrival at a permanent compound. Months later a man might be hauled to the camp commandant's office and accused of a serious crime like expectorating at a forbidden place. He then would be told that to avoid serious punishment he must make a public confession and self-criticism in front of his company or squad. Though the man usually managed to introduce enough idiom into such a procedure to ridicule it, the impact on other POWs of seeing a fellow prisoner humiliate himself was still considerable.

#### Rewards, Threats, and Punishments

Rewards and punishments were consistently manipulated to elicit collaborative behavior. Any tendency on the part of a POW to be cooperative with the Chinese was rewarded with increased food rations or luxury items like fresh fruit or cigarettes; any stiffening of resistance was punished with a decrease in food, medicine, or camp privileges, and, if resistance was chronic, led to segregation in special compounds for "reactionaries" in which hard labor was the typical activity. Threats of death or non-repatriation, occasionally backed by mock executions or severe physical punishment, effectively curbed any violent resistance efforts. The memory of the horrors of the first six months kept alive the knowledge that the Communists were more than willing to let men die or kill them if it suited their purpose.

Prizes of food would be given for essays to be published in the camp newspapers and the winning essay would invariably be the one which was most pro-Communist. Perhaps the most important reward for cooperation with the enemy was the status of "progressive," symbolized by being given a peace dove to wear in the lapel, which made it possible for the POW once again to enter into meaningful social relationships with others and to obtain a whole range of special privileges such as freedom of movement. For POWs who had not enjoyed any status in the society from which they came, such a status could be very meaningful even though

based on cooperation with the enemy.

### Lectures and Group Discussion

To present the Communist point of view and to provide the POWs with suitable reasons for why they should cooperate with the Chinese, the political sections of the Red Army units presented daily lectures to be followed by group discussions of the conclusions presented in the lecture. Attendance at both functions was mandatory and the group discussions were monitored by cadres or by "progressives." The content of the lectures was usually crude propaganda around topics like "Who Really Started the Korean War?" and was so full of blatant inaccuracies as to vitiate whatever appeal it might have had (e.g., the statement by the lecturer that "we know that in America very few of you own your own cars"). Certain specific themes like the plea for "peace" inevitably had appeal, however, and POWs found themselves supporting peace activities like signing petitions, inserting peace propaganda into their letters home (they were delivered only if such propaganda were inserted), and serving on peace committees which were formed in each camp.

### Results

What were the results of these various activities? The most important result was the social disorganization of the POW group which resulted in the bulk of the men withdrawing into an emotional shell and adapting as best they could by cooperating with the Chinese as much as they had to to survive but trying to avoid giving any aid to their propaganda efforts. The extent of this psychological withdrawal showed up clearly in studies of the repatriates. In their observable behavior and on psychological tests they showed marked emotional constriction, inability and unwillingness to get involved with others, and even some impairment of intellectual functioning (Strassman, Thaler & Schein, 1956; Schein, Hill, Williams & Lubin, 1957; Singer & Schein, 1958). It took a period of weeks or

months in some cases for the men once again to feel comfortable in close emotional relationships with others.

An important corollary result was the impairment of judgment which resulted from the social-emotional isolation. If a POW could not comfortably discuss his daily affairs with others, seek advice, or consider the consequences of actions he was contemplating, he was cut off from the most important source of validation available to man -- the opinions, beliefs, and knowledge of others. Much of the collaborative behavior of the POWs was unwitting or was based on very poor foresight. They often were unaware how skilled the Communists were in using propaganda and were equally unaware how their behavior might be construed as disloyal. The important point, however, is that collaborative behavior was usually not motivated by disloyalty or opportunism, but rather was the complex resultant of attempts to survive in an environment where standards for behavior were extremely difficult to discern.

Statistics on the amount of collaboration among captured Americans have varied with the criterion that was applied all the way from 70 percent to 10 percent of the POWs committing one or more acts of collaboration. These statistics become meaningless if one considers the ambiguity of the criterion and the difficulty the men had judging what was actually collaboration. What they do indicate, however, is that from the Chinese Communist point of view their efforts to produce propaganda must have seemed quite successful. On the other hand, the very small percentage of men who were to any degree swayed by the ideological message of the Communists must be considered a dramatic failure of their indoctrination program.

In managing the prison camps with a minimum of guards, the Communists were highly successful. The isolation of the camps, the ready identifiability of Westerners among the North Koreans, the social disorganization of the POW group,



and the fact that the armistice talks were going from early 1951 on all militated against extensive escape activities. Numerous ascapea were attempted but in most caaes the men were recovered after a fairly short time.

### Conclusions

This paper has attempted to survey some of the techniques used by the Chinese Communists on various target populations in their attempt to win converts to Communism. Because the Communists themselves do not have completely standardized methods of operation it has been imposable to be exhaustive in this snalysis, but an attempt has been made to describe the salient features of whst has come to be labelled as brainwashing.

The outstanding conclusion one comes away with from a study of these events is that the methods of brainwashing are not diabolical, new , or irresistible. Rather, the Chinese have drawn on their cultural sensitivity to the nuances of interpersonal relationships to put together some highly effective but well-known techniques of indoctrination. Their sophistication about the importance of the small group as a mediator of opinions and attitudes has led to some highly effective techniques of destroying group solidarity, as in the case of the POWs, and of using groups as a mechanism of changing attitudes, as in the political prisons. They have gone to tremendous efforts to influence the attitudea of any captive audience which has become available to them and have had some impressive results. But it remains a queation whether the handful of individuals influenced in prisons and the propaganda obtained in tha POW camps, given the tremendous effort expended in obtaining it, warrant the conclusion that brainwashing is a dangerous weapon in the Communist arsenal. My own opinion is that the events described above are of far greater significance to the social

scientist for whom they represent some fascinating natural experiments in attitude change, then they are to the policy maker or to those concerned with the politics of the conflict between ideologies. The student of Communist China should, however, watch closely the ultimate effects of thought reform on the Chinese population itself. It is possible that the Chinese have been far more successful than other totalitarian regimes in recent history in selling their ideology to the general population.

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